Teacher Academies:

Providing Professional

Development to a Community of Learners

by

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2000

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Prompted by concern for foreign language teacher recruitment and teacher quality, the Kentucky Department of Education piloted a Foreign Language Teacher Academy in the summer of 2000. The objectives were to (a) train teachers in elementary and middle school learning theories and practices, (b) provide them with an opportunity to practice their target language and receive instruction in content knowledge, and (c) offer ongoing networking support. The Academy, a one-week, intensive, partial-immersion experience and two one-day follow-up sessions, reflected current research on professional development design. This article will look at the effective characteristics of professional development, describe the Teacher Academy, its participants and products, and discuss the Academy's effects on teaching and learning.

Standards for Professional Development

Influenced by changes in how we look at teaching and learning, educators have spent a decade investigating the quality of professional development provided to in-service teachers. The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT) identified characteristics of effective professional development and the conditions under which it is best supported. Their principles focus on strategies for improving student learning over time. The American Federation of Teachers'

Professional Development Guidelines recommend that nine principles be followed to empower teachers to make complex instructional decisions and offer students a variety of relevant learning opportunities. State and local standards emphasize enabling teachers to align student learning with their own curriculum and assessment expectations. The standards and guidelines, however, share several specific elements for successful professional development, including the following:

- an enhancement of content knowledge

- the integration of theoretical underpinnings with research-based practices

- information about diverse learning processes and strategies

- a collaborative involvement in planning and learning

- opportunities for continuous and ongoing support from a variety of sources

- intellectual engagement and the promotion of continuous inquiry

- a direct relationship with measurable improvements in student achievement.

Finally, research has identified three structural features (form, duration, and collective participation), that create an effective context for professional development (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). Planners for teachers' in-service training can benefit from this body of research on professional development, but should also keep in mind the specific needs of foreign language teachers.

Professional Development for Foreign Language Teachers

When foreign language teachers' in-service training needs are being addressed, particular challenges present themselves, not the least of which is enabling them to continue to cultivate what Curtain and Pesola (l994) refer to as an "unprecedented combination of competencies" (p. 241). Maintaining and improving target language

proficiency in all of the modalities, as well as staying up to date on cultural topics (Peyton, l997) are crucial. Knowledge of the current technologies and how to integrate them into instruction (Met, l989) must be an ongoing process. Teachers being retrained to teach at new grade levels and to reach all students (Claire, 2000) require new pedagogical knowledge and age-appropriate strategies. In order for teachers to gain such a wide range of knowledge, strategies, and resources for an integrated approach to instruction, Glisan (l996) suggests a closer collaboration among various stakeholder groups in planning and implementing professional development. Teachers also need opportunities to continue to build their professional network and participate in activities promoting leadership. Last, to internalize what they have learned and envision change in their practice, teachers need an opportunity for self-reflection.

Kentucky Teacher Academies

The Kentucky Department of Education decided to sponsor a Foreign Language Teacher Academy in June 2000 as a part of a statewide effort to increase teachers' content knowledge. Three reasons prompted this decision. First, a trickle-down reaction to a new state foreign language pre-college curriculum regulation resulted in an increase in elementary and middle school foreign language classes. With few teachers certified or trained in FLES pedagogy, a retraining vehicle for secondary FL teachers was necessary. Second, Kentucky was involved in a bold Middle School Initiative to bolster teachers' content knowledge through 32 "core content" teacher academies. The rationale behind the initiative was the idea that, with the strengthening of middle school teachers' content knowledge, student learning and students' scores on the state assessments would be positively impacted. Foreign languages are considered electives in Kentucky, and,

therefore were not initially included. Finally, Kentucky had been awarded a Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grant, $30,000 of which was designated to fund a Foreign Language Teacher Academy, but because money was allocated too late to implement an Academy concurrent with the others sponsored by the Commonwealth, the Kentucky Department of Education agreed to fund a pilot Academy.

The Kentucky Teacher Academies are designed for standards- and research-based professional development. They are teacher-focused, relying on teacher participants to construct the agenda and activities, and provide ample opportunity to establish an active network among colleagues. Delivered by university faculty and expert teachers, the material of the Academy is both discipline-based and content-grounded. Long-term support is provided for teachers in the form of two follow-up meetings during the school year.

An Academy is a very appropriate format for creating a community of learners. In the case of the Foreign Language Teacher Academy, a cohort of French, German, and Spanish teachers was brought together for intensive and ongoing training in FLES concepts and strategies. The Academy provided a partial-immersion environment for language practice and afforded teachers an opportunity to develop activities and enjoy hands-on experience with instructional technology. It also promoted collegiality and professionalism through team-building activities and encouraged leadership, which subsequently emerged in the state foreign language teachers' association and other professional activities.

Participants

Thirty teachers applied for and were accepted into the Academy. Each received a stipend of $400 for the summer experience and $50 for each follow-up day. School districts were asked to cover the cost of teachers' travel and lodging. The average age of the 6 male and 24 females participants was 44 and the average years taught was 14. Twenty-three of the participants had advanced degrees. Only 3 held elementary foreign language teacher certification. Nineteen teachers had high school assignments; 5 taught in middle schools, and 6 taught at the elementary level, 4 of whom were in partial-immersion schools. Fifteen participants taught only Spanish, with 2 facilitating online courses for Kentucky Virtual High School, a statewide service delivering high school courses and online learning activities to public schools. Two participants taught solely French, and one, German. The remainder taught a combination of two languages.

Six of the teachers had previously participated in a week-long workshop but had not taken part in a long-term professional development experience. In response to questions posed on the opening day of the Academy, 26 of the teachers stated that updating themselves on current teaching methods and professional issues was their primary reason for participation. Nearly all responded that they hoped to learn new strategies and best practices, to gain knowledge of current research-based methods, and to make connections with colleagues. Some participants mentioned the need to learn more about technology, develop activities, and align their curriculum with foreign language standards.

The Summer Foreign Language Teacher Academy

The 5-day Teacher Academy was conducted in cooperation with Kentucky Educational Television (KET) and the University of Kentucky. The workshop was developed and directed by the state foreign language consultant and a highly skilled educator with elementary immersion teaching experience. The daily schedule consisted of morning presentations, lunch with a speaker, and afternoon immersion activities. The afternoon sessions were facilitated in the target language by the Spanish-immersion instructor, a French-speaking district foreign language specialist, and a nationally recognized distance-learning German teacher. At dinner and in the evening, participants were encouraged to relax and get to know their new colleagues.

The morning presentations were made by teacher trainers, teachers, and university professors and centered on research-based instruction in second-language acquisition and learning theories, followed by a discussion of the strategies and skills, age-appropriate to middle school students but adaptable to all levels of learners. Topics included brain research, Krashen's "natural approach," learning styles, multiple intelligences, Total Physical Response (TPR), TPR Storytelling (TPRS), content-based instruction, and technology. Essential questions were shared with participants to frame each day's work. On the 1st and 3rd days, for example, the following questions were asked:

Day 1: How does acquiring a language differ from learning it? What does brain research tell us about learning a foreign language? Which methods of instruction best implement that which research suggests about learning?

Day 2: In what ways can content be an organizer for foreign language learning? How can the use of core content in a foreign language class enhance student achievement? How can I align my curriculum with Kentucky's Core Content

for Assessment and the foreign language standards?

Morning sessions were often intense and challenging in their theoretical approach. To help internalize their new knowledge and make a mental transition to practice in their own classrooms, teachers were asked to write reflections on questions such as these:

When I take a test what types of assessments do I prefer? When I plan a test for my students, what types of assessments do I find easiest and most enjoyable to plan? How can I adapt the Multiple Intelligences theory to my test taking?

Based on what I am presently teaching, what content areas are most easily adapted to content-based instruction? What is the biggest concern I have about content-based or content-related teaching?

To what extent do I feel I can implement the TPRS method? What are some of the challenges I may face in putting it to use? How would using this method benefit my students?

How can technology best serve my professional needs?

At lunch participants relaxed and networked with colleagues before hearing from a variety of speakers on community resources and technologies. Welcoming the participants to Kentucky Educational Television, which hosted the Academy, the director of instruction spoke to participants about the inner workings of educational television in

the Commonwealth. A school principal spoke about his experience on the committee that created the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and described how the experience impacted his approach to teaching and leadership. Making the connections between foreign languages and core content areas of humanities and social studies, representatives from a local arts council presented a slide show and modeled costumes from a partnership exhibit on Equadorian and Kentucky landscape.

To balance the morning's theoretical approach, afternoon activities focused on the strategies and technologies needed to engage elementary school students with diverse learning styles. Participants broke into language specific groups to practice their target language and develop lessons and activities that reflected theory and connected with community. French teachers, for example, worked collaboratively, using semantic maps to generate ideas for classroom activities that addressed one or more of the multiple intelligences and introduced students to the plight of the homeless in Paris through the song *Les Sans Papiers* from the play *Notre Dame de Paris*. These afternoon sessions created a language-rich environment for both hands-on work and networking.

Technology Component

All Teacher Academies were required to address the Kentucky technology standards. A district technology coordinator demonstrated WebQuest design and provided teachers Internet resource samples and templates. A Latin instructor at Kentucky Educational Television explained electronic course construction and implementation. Two of the participants, Spanish instructors for the Kentucky Virtual High School, joined the discussion and demonstrated the on-line courses they were in the process of developing. In addition, one of the Academy facilitators, a KET distance-

learning German instructor, led the participants on a tour of the impressive facilities as she explained television course design and delivery. Her information on best practices for distance learning instruction versus classroom teacher instruction provoked interesting discussions. Participants were also offered an opportunity to experience studio filming and to take part in a live hook-up with a distance learning coordinator at a state university. Participants agreed that the experience with this particular technology was something they had not previously experienced, and it gave them a new perspective on teaching and learning. When, as part of the follow-up planning process, teachers suggested topics for future study, technology and TPRS led the list.

A second and ongoing aspect of technology for Academy participants was the opportunity for electronic networking through <blackboard.com>. A University of Kentucky foreign language methods professor enrolled each participant into the virtual course in order to facilitate communication during the school year. It was believed that by having a vehicle for discussion, teachers could talk to one another about their post-Academy classroom experiences with newly learned strategies. This element of the Academy proved disappointing when, after 2 months, fewer and fewer participants actively communicated. Most cited time restraints as a reason for not participating in the online discussions, although the lack of consistent monitoring should also be considered a factor. Others expressed frustration with difficulties in entering the site when they returned home, even with help from the facilitator.

While every participant was encouraged to communicate on line with Academy colleagues, the virtual discussion served another purpose as well. The University of Kentucky collaborated with the Kentucky Department of Education to offer custom plans

for one to three hours of graduate credit to any Academy participant. Three teachers chose to earn credits in this manner and, as a course requirement, served as facilitators for the online discussions.

Follow-up Days

In addition to the week-long summer experience, Academy teachers were required to participate in two follow-up days: one at the Kentucky Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (KCTFL) fall conference; and a second in the spring at the Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conference. At the KCTFL conference, 29 of the 30 Academy members met for two 90-minute sessions with their directors and facilitators. The first session focused on reviewing the theories and strategies presented in the summer and sharing experiences from classroom implementation. During the second session, teachers presented the WebQuest lessons they had been assigned to develop. This assignment proved more difficult than expected. Only two-thirds of the participants had completed the assignment. Many found the experience difficult and time consuming and, despite the emphasis on use of the target language, several participants designed tasks that allowed students to use English. Participants agreed to try to complete their WebQuest by the spring meeting. In addition, teachers were assigned to design a lesson based on one element of the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment for the next meeting.

For many of the teachers, this was the first time they had attended the state conference of the Kentucky Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. They overwhelmingly agreed that being part of a cohort group and seeing familiar faces from the Academy helped them to feel comfortable.

The second follow-up meeting was held in March at the Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conference which focuses on the use of technology in the classroom. Academy directors chose this conference because of the featured speakers, Bernie Dodge, originator of the WebQuest, and David Sousa, author of How the brain learns: A Classroom teacher's guide (2001), whose sessions offered a reinforcement of the concepts and activities introduced during the summer Academy. Because of the $75 registration fee, the meeting was scheduled after the sessions, and attendance at the conference, while encouraged, was not mandatory. Originally, it was hoped that participants would join the directors and facilitators in presenting a session on the WebQuest that would feature their products; however, only 7 teachers attended this follow-up meeting and none chose to present. Cost, scheduling in March, a traditionally busy month, and lack of administrative support to attend the Thursday-Saturday conference may have contributed to the low attendance. Several teachers electronically submitted their completed WebQuest, 7 of which were burned onto a CD and given to Academy members and to participants at the Teaching and Learning Conference session.

Project Evaluation

The effectiveness of the Academy experience can be evaluated by looking at: (1) participants' responses to an evaluation survey, (2) the online discussion activity, (3) attendance at the two follow-up day meetings and subsequent professional conferences, (4) WebQuest products, and (5) leadership roles taken by participants.

All participants completed a 14-statement survey (Table I) and responded to four questions in order to evaluate the five-day summer Academy experience. (The same survey was given to participants in all 33 Kentucky Teacher Academies.) The responses

were overwhelmingly positive. One hundred percent of the teachers either strongly agreed (83%) or agreed (l7%) that the material they were presented would be useful to them in the classroom. Ninety-seven percent (77% strongly agree; 20% agree) expressed feeling comfortable implementing the newly learned strategies. Participants stated that the greatest benefits of their experience were collaborating with colleagues and learning new ideas and strategies for teaching. The strategies most cited by the participants were Total Physical Response, TPR Storytelling, and using technology. Participants found the weaknesses of the Academy to be too few speakers of German, having to absorb "overwhelming" amounts of new information, and limited time for reflection.

Even though participants valued the opportunity to learn about technology and build a network of colleagues, only a few actively participated beyond the first month in the online discussion. However, in notes posted in <blackboard.com> references were made to the fact that participants were communicating directly by e-mail with some of their colleagues. According to participants' remarks at the first follow-up meeting, networking did prove to be successful in establishing a comfortable and friendly environment for teachers at the state conference of the Kentucky Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, a professional event that some referred to as previously being "intimidating."

Of the 30 participants, 27 attended the first follow-up meeting held three months later at the fall conference of the Kentucky Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (KCTFL). Far fewer attended the second follow-up meeting at the much larger Teaching and Learning Conference, not solely for foreign language teachers. After the KCTFL conference, participants said that seeing Academy friends, sharing

professional experiences from the new school year, and being involved in a special group activity contributed to creating a positive and welcoming environment that supported them personally, as well as professionally. One year later, 16 of the participants returned to the KCTFL conference. Their return suggested a growing feeling of comfort with the organization and a connection to the profession. Five teachers returned to participate in a second Teacher Academy.

The WebQuests created by participants demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses of the Academy. These teacher-designed products shed light on the participants' interest in and comfort level with technology, the lack of adequate time during the summer session devoted to learning and practicing WebQuest design, and participants' use of the target language in their daily instruction. Only a few admitted finding the technology easy to manage and the WebQuest concept comfortable to work with. With just a half day devoted to the WebQuest, most teachers were not adequately prepared to create an activity of their own. Even working in pairs, they found the task difficult. The quality of the WebQuest products showed that participants needed more time to master the concept of designing an actual WebQuest versus an Internet activity. The pervasive use of English in task directions and a lack of expectation for student response in the target language suggest that the teachers resort to the frequent use of English for complicated or in-depth activities. Academy directors concluded that if they expected future Foreign Language Academy participants to develop a high quality technology-based product, they would need to: (a) inform participants of the desired outcome on the first day, (b) build in more time for guided instruction and hands-on work, (c) reinforce the importance of using the target language in all phases of teaching

and learning, and (d) create opportunities for teachers to learn and use the target language vocabulary that they and their students would need for technology-based learning.

One of the objectives of the Academy was to support teachers' professional growth and through networking and confidence building, encourage leadership. There were immediate examples of teachers' responses to leadership opportunities. One second-year teacher chose to run for and was elected to an office in the state chapter of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF). Another agreed to serve on a two-year state-sponsored Foreign Language Framework team and this year began teaching an online language course for the Kentucky Virtual High School. Already actively involved in the state foreign language teachers' association (KCTFL), a third teacher organized and co-directed a Spanish Teacher Academy in summer, 2001. The *Kentucky Teacher* published an article featuring an Academy participant's innovative grant-funded unit for Spanish and physical education students that addressed the multiple intelligences and integrated arts and humanities dance core content with language and culture. Two other examples of leadership include one participant's quest for national teaching certification and two teachers' first-time attendance and presentation at a conference of a national foreign language association.

Conclusion

Designing professional development for foreign language teachers is a challenging task, made more valuable by following research-based standards and guidelines. The Kentucky Foreign Language Teacher Academy proved to be an effective format. A week-long session insured that the intensive theoretical instruction and hands-on activities included time to reflect and network with colleagues. The ongoing nature of

the Academy provided participants time and support to implement what they had learned and an opportunity to be involved in planning follow-up days' activities that addressed their needs.

The Academy positively impacted teachers' content knowledge by providing them a daily opportunity to practice the target language. It increased their knowledge and use of research-based strategies, particularly Total Physical Response Storytelling and content-based instruction. Teachers' knowledge and use of technology also increased, although it is recommended that additional training is needed for teachers to become competent in designing the WebQuest. The Academy strengthened teachers' knowledge of second language acquisition theories, but there was no evidence of any increase in the use of the target language in the classroom. Directors strongly recommended that in future Academies a variety of activities be used to prepare teachers to increase their classroom use of the target language in all phases of instruction. It is also recommended that student work samples be analyzed prior to and after the Academy to look for effects on student learning.

The greatest impact the Academy had on its participants was building supportive networks, which lead to an increased participation in professional activities and leadership roles. The long-term and ongoing nature of an Academy allows teachers to reinforce their new knowledge and develop professional relationships over time. Meeting for follow-up sessions at conferences provides a professional forum for renewing the discussion and stretching in new directions. It takes to change perspectives and instructional habits, and as professional development planners we can best serve teachers

by providing them the opportunities to learn and grow in a nurturing community of learners.

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Table II

"Five-Day Summer Academy Experience: Evaluation Survey"
Directions: Please answer the following questions on the answer sheet provided.
   A. strongly agree
   B. agree
   C. no opinion
   D. disagree
   E. strongly disagree
Summary of responses in percentages based on 30 participants:

		A	B	C	D	E
1.	The time was efficiently used during the five-day academy experience	83%	17%			
2.	The five-day academy experience met my needs/expectations	83%	17%			
3.	The main presenter(s) provided me with more in-depth understanding in the content studied.	87%	10%		3%	
4.	The main content presenter(s) was(were) knowledgeable in their field.	90%	7%		3%	
5.	The main content presenter(s) answered questions effectively.	77%	20%		3%	
6.	The content presented connected to and supported the program of studies and the core content for assessment.	83%	17%			
7.	The content covered will be useful in my classroom.	83%	17%			
8.	I feel comfortable using the materials/resources received during the five-day academy experience for classroom instruction.	77%	20%	3%		
9.	The resources received are applicable to my grade level.	73%	27%			
10.	As a result of the five-day academy experience, I feel more confident teaching this content.	77%	20%		3%	
11.	As a result of the five-day academy experience, I can now approach this content with my students in a different or innovative way.	73%	23%		3%	
12.	The instructional strategies used during the academy were effective for me as a learner.	70%	27%		3%	
13.	The five-day academy experience gave me the opportunity to meet other participants and share ideas.	97%	3%			
14.	I will contact other academy participants throughout the school year you discuss content issues.	87%	13%			